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MONTANA
Driver & Traffic Safety Education

Information Booklet

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MONTANA
Driver & Traffic Safety Education Information Booklet

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BF21783

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Experience is a poor and dangerous teacher. The lesson is taught after the test is given.

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Foreword

Over the years, driver education has come under attack from various sources. At one time, it was the professional driving school industry which had a vested interest in seeing its decline. Then it was an organization clearly noted for its safety engineering interests.

In recent years, as budgets in public schools have tightened, educators have had to scrutinize and make increasingly difficult decisions about the amount of financial support each program receives. Driver and Traffic Safety Education has been and continues to be a prime candidate for cost cutting. Educators at decision-making levels, namely school board members, have had to carefully assess the impact of Driver and Traffic Safety Education on the lives of children and the implications of the program for the total school curriculum.

At all levels of decision-making, a need exists for a factual basis upon which a course of action may be determined. The Driver and Traffic Safety Education Information Booklet is designed to provide you with essential information to make sound decisions concerning Driver and Traffic Safety Education.

For the past 13 years, Montana has seen an overall decline in the mileage death rate involving motor vehicles (see Appendix). Driver Education is one facet of the Montana Safety Program that has helped bring that about.

Driver Education: A Definition

Driver education is a learning experience provided for the purpose of helping students to become good traffic citizens and to operate motor vehicles safely and efficiently. Instruction centers on alcohol, drugs, other harmful substances and driving; characteristics of drivers; development of judgment; development of driving skills; driving experience through simulation; traffic laws and ordinances; the motor vehicle; traffic collision avoidance; traffic citizenship; and other relevant learning experiences and information.

What can a Driver Education Program Provide the Student?

The program is designed to provide the student with 60 hours of instruction, six of which must be behind-the-wheel-in-traffic driving. The program offers a variety of learning experiences that will provide the student an opportunity to develop skills in safe driving.

A student has a better understanding of the alternatives in this decision-making process and can become a safe and defensive driver through the use of the knowledge acquired in the program. On the other hand, driver education programs are not designed to produce experienced drivers, since that takes many years to develop.

Questions & Answers Covering Montana Driver Education

Question:
Do all schools offer a driver education program?
Answer:
Currently all secondary public schools offer a driver education program within the four-year period a student spends in high school. Because some schools are small, the program may only be offered once in the four-year period or through another neighboring school while large schools may offer it more often.

Question:
What percentage of the students attending high school enroll in driver education?
Answer:
During 1981-82, 88 percent of all eligible students were enrolled in driver education. This is based on ninth grade class figures since this is the target group for enrollment. Actual enrollment was 10,320 students.

Question:
What percentage of all secondary public schools offer a driver education program annually?
Answer:
94 percent. The actual number was 152 schools.

Question:
Do most schools offer only a summer course in driver education?
Answer:
No. 102 schools offered both a summer and a school year program.

Question:
What is the average per-pupil cost?
Answer:
The average per-pupil cost was $184.55.*

Question:
Some schools require a course enrollment fee. What is the most common fee and what is the range?
Answer:
The most common fee was $30 with a range from a low of $5 to a high of $55.*

*1981-82 figures

In Support of Driver Education

—Carl Magsamen, President of the Illinois high school and college Driver Education Association, equated getting rid of driver education to reduce accidents with dropping swimming lessons to cut drownings.

—Allstate Insurance Company states their actuarial experience demonstrates that the trained driver in the high school program has a better accident record than those drivers without the training. The bodily injury property damage loss ratio for the discounted group was 78.6 percent and for the non-discounted group was 85.0 percent. Without the discount the loss comparison would be 66.8 percent for the discounted group, 85.0 percent for the non-discounted group.

—Aetna Life & Casualty compared the frequency of claims per 100 cars and the claim cost per car for more than 175,000 drivers under 20 years old insured by Aetna in all 50 states and found that youthful operators with driver education credit had fewer and less expensive claims for both liability and collision coverage.

—The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has endorsed high quality driver education in secondary schools, estimating that a program can reduce the likelihood of crash involvement by 10 to 15 percent for those exposed to it.

—A State of Illinois study revealed that untrained youngsters were involved in 493 traffic violations and 111 accidents per thousand drivers. The corresponding figures for the driver education group were 171 and 56.

—A three-year federal study in DeKalb County, Georgia, that sampled 18,000 students, found that "Graduates of Driver Education programs account for substantially fewer drunk driving arrests and traffic violations than drivers without any formal training." Also, "Driver Education graduates are more likely to wear safety belts and are more knowledgeable about community traffic safety problems."

—The Government Employees Insurance Company (GEICO) was so supportive of the District of Columbia driver education program that when the local financial support for the program was dropped, GEICO stepped in and underwrote the total program for one year.

—A Florida State University study attributes a statewide savings of at least $26.5 million and a 10 percent effectiveness in reducing involvement in traffic accidents to a quality statewide driver education program.

Question:

What course returns both immediate and long-range economic benefits to students, parents, and the community at large?

Answer:

Young people who do well in driver education get discounts on insurance, have better collision and violation records, drive efficiently and use less gas. They appreciate the value of property, are more likely to show good citizenship on the road, buckle their seat belts more often, and spend their transportation dollars more wisely. As effective drivers, they are more employable.

Question:

Does driver education encourage teenagers to get their licenses earlier than if they had not taken the course?

Answer:

No. Although driver education was originally launched to improve driver safety, it has *raised* the licensing age over the years. Licenses were once available to people at any age; driver education helped move the age to 15. In some states the eligible age was raised to 18 for teens without training. The decision to obtain a license is strictly a personal and family matter.

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One measure of whether driver education is a successful program could be the reduction of traffic accidents and deaths.

Various studies have indicated this to be the case. Another point to be made is that many insurance companies, in business to make a profit for the shareholders, continue to give discounts for students completing the driver education program because their records support the contention that driver education graduates do have fewer and less costly accidents.

Horace Mann's premise that schools exist to teach children to do better the things they will do anyway certainly made the case for driver education in the schools.

Appendix

Montana Motor Vehicle Deaths

Year	Actual Number	Change From Previous Year	Montana Mileage Rate	National Mileage Rate
1968	289		7.0	5.4
1969	339	+50	7.6	5.3
1970	318	-21	6.5	4.8
1971	328	+10	6.5	4.6
1972	395	+67	7.3	4.5
1973	323	-72	5.8	4.3
1974	299	-24	5.1	3.6
1975	298	-1	5.2	3.5
1976	300	+2	4.9	3.3
1977	320	+20	5.0	3.4
1978	271	-49	3.9	3.3
1979	332	+61	4.9	3.4
1980	325	-7	N/A	N/A
1981	338	+13	N/A	N/A

From: Accident Facts, National Safety Council, Chicago, IL.